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The Salvation Army USA Central Territory News

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The Salvation Army Assists Victims in Illinois Human Trafficking Investigation “Little Girl Lost”

State's Attorney Anita Alvarez Thanks The Salvation Army's STOP-IT Program

The Salvation Army's STOP-IT Program is providing psychological treatment, residential placement and supportive services for victims of gang members charged yesterday with sex trafficking in the nation's first-ever state-based wiretap investigation, “Little Girl Lost.” Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez announced the charges at a press conference yesterday, at which she thanked The Salvation Army *Stop-It* program for delivering assistance to victims of sex trafficking.

The State's Attorney's federally funded **Human Trafficking Unit** works in partnership with *STOP-IT*, and during the investigation, Salvation Army service providers were embedded with police and prosecutors in order to provide real-time referrals for the recovered young women and girls.

STOP-IT provides psychological and medical treatment, educational services and vocational training for victims who have been harmed by the sex trade. The program also actively combats human trafficking by educating the community on identifying the “red flags” of human trafficking, operating a 24-hour hotline and reaching out to and assisting the victims of trafficking. The Salvation Army Metropolitan Division has built collaborative relationships with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, the Chicago Police Department and juvenile service providers and has conducted extensive outreach in an effort to identify victims, aid their safe exit and connect them with needed services. *STOP-IT* was authorized by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008.

“The Salvation Army is deeply committed to helping children and adults escape the predatory and abusive crimes of commercial sexual exploitation and find safety, treatment, support and healing,” said **Lt. Col. Ralph Bukiewicz**, Salvation Army Metropolitan Divisional Commander. “The disturbing details surrounding the crimes committed in this case and the extreme suffering of these young victims underscores why we are so honored to partner with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office and Chicago law enforcement officials in the fight against the escalating problem of sex trafficking and underage prostitution.”

According to the press release issued by the office of Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez, some of the children and young women sex-trafficked were as young as 12 years old. In almost every instance, the traffickers or “pimps” used indoctrination, drugs, threats, beatings and intimidation to control the young women and to prevent them from leaving their custody. The traffickers employed extensive physical and emotional abuse, as well as the use of other psychological tactics, including branding tattoos, face-slashing, beatings, forced bowing and “trunking,” a punishment that involves locking the young woman or girl in the trunk of a car and driving around for extended periods of time.

“Street gang members are not just selling drugs any longer, they are selling children and young women for sex right here in our own backyards, in some of the most violent and appalling cases of sex trafficking,” Alvarez said. “Most of these young women and children are recruited and seduced into this life by experienced predators that first prey on their vulnerabilities and then force them into a violent and demeaning ordeal.”

Operation “Little Girl Lost” was a long-term undercover investigation into the forced sex-trafficking of children and young women by Chicago street gang members, which resulted in charges against nine offenders in the nation’s first-ever state-based wiretap investigation targeting the crime of human trafficking, announced Cook County and Chicago law enforcement officials.

The investigation employed the first full use of the provisions of the Illinois Safe Children’s Act, a sweeping new law written by the State’s Attorney’s Office and approved by the General Assembly last year. Among its provisions, the Safe Children’s Act provides law enforcement with new court-ordered wiretap authorities, increased criminal penalties and the new fees and penalties for customers or “johns,” which directly help fund police operations and social services.

For more information about how The Salvation Army combats human trafficking and assists victims of human trafficking, visit www.sa-stopit.org. **The STOP-IT 24-hour hotline is 877-606-3158.**

The Salvation Army also operates the **PROMISE** program (**Partnership to Rescue our Minors from Sexual Exploitation**). PROMISE has trained more than **10,000** first responders across five major U.S. cities in human trafficking prevention, identification and intervention skills. In September 2010, The Salvation Army opened **Anne’s House**, a residential home for women and girls who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. Anne’s House provides a safe, nurturing environment; long-term trauma treatment; life skills training; and education for young women ages 12-21 who are victims of sexual abuse and violence. Anne’s House is one of only a few homes in the U.S. providing residential care and long-term therapeutic treatment for victims of human trafficking.

About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army, an evangelical part of the universal Christian church established in 1865, has been supporting those in need in His name without discrimination for 129 years in the United States. Nearly 30 million Americans receive assistance from The Salvation Army each year through the broadest array of social services that range from providing food for the hungry, relief for disaster victims, assistance for the disabled, outreach to the elderly and ill, clothing and shelter to the homeless and opportunities for underprivileged children. About 83 cents of every dollar raised is used to support those services in 5,000 communities nationwide. For more information, go to www.salvationarmyusa.org.

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